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ABSTRACT

Characteristics of effective teacher evaluations are reviewed, and some common teacher concerns are discussed. A teacher evaluation system should give teachers useful feedback on classroom needs, the opportunity to learn new teaching techniques, and counsel from principals and other teachers on how to make changes in their classrooms. Standards for evaluation should: relate to important teaching skills; be as objective as possible; be clearly communicated before the evaluation begins and reviewed after the evaluation is completed; and be linked to teachers' professional development. Some procedures evaluators can use are to: (1) observe classroom activities; (2) review lesson plans and classroom records; and (3) expand the number of people involved in the evaluations. Equally important is reporting the results of the evaluation to give teachers adequate, but not overwhelming, feedback. Linking teacher evaluation to professional development is essential. Teachers often have real concerns about the evaluation process; these concerns include the following: teachers do not have any input into the evaluation process; evaluators do not spend enough time on the evaluation; evaluators are not well trained; and results of the evaluation are not being used to further teacher development. To make teacher evaluation a positive experience for both the teacher and the evaluator, the evaluator must ensure that the process is more than an empty exercise. (SLD)

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Improving Teacher Evaluations

by Ronald T. C. Boyd

Teacher evaluations are often designed to serve two purposes: *to measure teacher competence* and *to foster professional development and growth.* This digest discusses characteristics of effective teacher evaluations and some common teacher concerns.

Effective Teacher Evaluations

A teacher evaluation system should give teachers useful feedback on classroom needs, the opportunity to learn new teaching techniques, and counsel from principals and other teachers on how to make changes in their classrooms. To achieve these goals, evaluators must first set specific procedures and standards. The standards should

- relate to important teaching skills,
- be as objective as possible,
- be clearly communicated to the teacher before the evaluation begins and be reviewed after the evaluation is over, and
- be linked to the teacher's professional development.

Evaluators should consider a variety of teaching skills. If evaluators use several sources of information about a teacher's performance, they can make a more accurate evaluation. Some procedures evaluators can use are to

- **Observe classroom activities.** This is by far the most common form of data collection for evaluation. The goal of class observations is to obtain a representative sample of a teacher's performance in the classroom. Evaluators cannot accomplish this goal with a sample of only a few hours of observation or with an observation of only one class. Observations can be formal and planned or informal and unannounced. Both forms of evaluation can provide valuable information.
- **Review lesson plans and classroom records.** Lesson plans can reflect how well a teacher has thought through instructional goals. Looking at classroom records, such as tests and assignments, can indicate how well a teacher has linked lesson plans, instruction, and testing.
- **Expand the number of people involved in the evaluations.** Most often principals or department supervisors conduct evaluations. Again, many state laws and collective bargaining agreements specify that teachers' supervisors evaluate their performances. This system works well if the only goal of evaluation is to determine competence. If the goal of evaluation is to promote growth, however, other evaluators should participate. Self-evaluations give teachers perspective on their work. Surprisingly, few school systems require self-evaluations. Peer and student evaluations, if schools administer them properly, can also benefit teachers.

Teachers who want to improve their teaching are eager to know how other teachers and their students view them. These are the people who interact with the teacher every day; their perspectives should not be ignored during the evaluation process.

Reporting the Results of the Evaluation

A post-observation conference can give teachers feedback on their strengths and weaknesses. Evaluators must remember to:

- deliver the feedback in a positive and considerate way,
- offer ideas and suggest changes that make sense to the teacher,
- maintain a level of formality necessary to achieve the goals of the evaluation,
- maintain a balance between praise and criticism,
- give enough feedback to be useful but not so much that the teacher is overwhelmed.

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Linking Teacher Evaluation to Professional Development

Linking evaluation and development is a difficult task for teachers, evaluators, and principals. Although there are few easy answers, evaluation can be used to

- work with teachers to set specific, achievable goals;
- provide constructive criticism and suggestions to improve weak areas and amplify strengths; and
- enlist experienced teachers to help improve the performance of less experienced teachers.

Teacher Concerns

Experienced teachers often state that evaluations are not productive. Some of this dissatisfaction is based on experiences which can be avoided:

- **Teachers not having any input into the evaluation criteria.** Other professionals (doctors, lawyers, engineers) control the criteria for entering and maintaining membership in their profession. Teachers, on the other hand, often do not have that privilege. State laws or school board decides the focus of the evaluation. This leads teachers to distrust the evaluation process and to question the validity of the results it produces.
- **Evaluators not spending enough time on the evaluation.** Teachers complain that the principal, or whoever is conducting the evaluation, does not have the time to gather quality information and provide useful feedback. After a teacher's first year evaluation, he or she may not have another evaluation for two or three years, sometimes longer.
- **Evaluators not being well trained.** Teachers complain that few evaluators have any special training to help them plan and carry out a successful evaluation. Even worse, many have had little or no recent experience in the classroom. The criteria for evaluations are often vague, subjective, and inconsistent. This robs the evaluator of the credibility needed to carry out an effective evaluation.
- **Results of evaluations not being used to further teacher development.** For many teachers, the evaluation process can be a dead end. The results do not figure into salary increases, promotions, or any meaningful program for professional development. Few districts have established a clear link between teacher evaluation and teacher development.

Conclusion

Teacher evaluations can be a positive experience for both the teacher and the evaluator. The challenge for evaluators is to make the evaluation process a meaningful experience, not simply an empty exercise.

Additional Reading

Duke, Daniel L.; Stiggins, Richard J. (1986) *Teacher Evaluation: Five Keys to Growth.* The National Education Association, Washington, D.C., ED 275 069.

This guide for teachers and evaluators stresses that teacher growth can promote school effectiveness. The authors describe the attributes of an evaluation that produces teacher growth.

Galluzzo, Gary R. (1987) "Assessment of Teaching Skills of Beginning Teachers." In: *What's Happening in Teacher Testing.* Lawrence M. Rudner, Ed. U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., ED 284 867.

This book chapter reviews programs for first year teachers that screen teachers for quality and provide on-the-job assistance for teachers who require it.

Stiggins, Richard J.; Bridgeford, Nancy J. (Spring 1985) "Performance Assessment for Teacher Development." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis.* vol. 7, no. 1.

This article discusses the potential conflict between evaluation systems that must judge teacher effectiveness and encourage teacher development.

Veenman, Simon. (Summer 1984) "Perceived Problems of Beginning Teachers." *Review of Educational Research,* vol. 54, no. 2.

This article reviews perceived problems of beginning teachers in their first years of teaching. Teacher development and forms of planned support for beginning teachers are discussed.

Wise, A. E., (1984) *Case Studies for Teacher Evaluation: A Study of Effective Practices.* Rand Corp., Santa Monica, CA. ED 251 952.

This book provides indepth descriptions of four exemplary teacher evaluation programs representing a wide range of approaches and environments. Policy context, organizational setting, program goals, and actual practice are discussed.

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